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ABSTRACT

This paper examines factors that have influenced education in the United States. It focuses on the crisis of confidence as American schools struggle between two competing "philosophies" of education: the traditional and the progressive. The paper outlines the tension created by youthful rebelliousness and the conservatism of elders and how the counterculture of the 1960s foisted an unrelenting attack on established authority. The ensuing struggle between traditional and progressive approaches saw the ascension of progressive ideas--ideas that have generated controversy and weakened the social consensus necessary for effective schools. As a result, current educational practices may be seen as coalescing into two groups, depending on the approach taken for various dimensions of schooling. Traditional education has become associated with concepts like subject-centered teaching, standards, examinations, structure, order, work discipline, memorization, mastery of subject content, order, and accountability. Notions that have attached themselves to progressive education include child-centered instruction, emotions, activity, relevance, discovery, critical thinking, growth, and creativity. The paper concludes that no matter what pedagogical reasons might be given to justify a given educational practice, there remain psychological and social implications that ultimately speak to the social values underlying traditional and progressive practices. (Includes a table that lists 10 sets of values and their expressions in educational practices.) (Author/RJM)

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Values and Their Expression in Educational Practices

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Abstract

Values and Their Expression in Educational Practices

American schools are facing a crisis of confidence as they find themselves embroiled in a struggle between two competing "philosophies" of education -- the traditional and the progressive. Broadly speaking, educational practices in today's schools may be seen as clustering into two identifiable groups, depending on the approach they take to various dimensions of schooling such as: organization, management, curriculum, and instruction. Social values underlie various traditional and progressive educational practices. And no matter what pedagogical reasons might be put forth to justify the adoption of a given educational practice, there remain psychological and social implications that ultimately speak to that set of values

Values and Their Expression in Educational Practices

It's an understandable, if perhaps narcissistic conceit, for people to think that the times in which *they* live are somehow unique. Yet, there is evidence that, in the last half of the twentieth century, we have witnessed a historical anomaly -- one with profound consequences for ourselves, our children, and our civilization.

A sense of loss besets America today. In the midst of a triumph of the West, and in a time of unparalleled affluence, we seem to have lost our way. Kenneth Keniston (1965, 3), in a seminal work written several decades ago, pointed to the approaching crisis, when he observed that we were on our way to "losing those values and heroes which, in a perhaps romanticized past, seemed to have given order and meaning to our lives".

Keniston went on to point out that in America, our experience of accelerating, and technologially driven, social change is augmented by "the relative absence in American life of established forces interested in preserving the status quo...", a situation Kenniston (1965, 216) attributed to our lack of a feudal past. Thus it was, that armed with such relatively weak traditions the establishment was to face the social rebellion of the 1960s -- an era often recognized as a watershed in American history. During those years we saw the beginnings of a revolution, one in which youth were enlisted, and eventually took over leadership roles. Theirs was a generation of protest, spawned by the civil rights movement, and fueled by the Vietnam war.

The Making of a Counterculture

From time immemorial youth have rebelled against their elders. It is a drama played out repeatedly throughout the history of mankind; the scenario, well known. Youth: brash, energetic, idealistic, iconoclastic, and impatient with the pace of change, challenges the more staid and conservative traditions, pushing against the establishment, in a test of limits. It is not unlike the growing teenager challenging his parents in a surge of filial rebellion. And, just as with parents, the established order may bend under the attack, but it does not yield. It remains true to its trust as the keeper of traditional values, values that are to be transmitted to later generations.

Who were these students of the protest generation -- those young people bent on forming a "counterculture"? They made virtue out of an unkempt appearance, inarticulateness, a lack of manners; they flaunted their profound disrespect for all authority, and their contempt for the work ethic. They adopted a pervasive sense of relativism, especially moral and cultural relativism, which was to fuel their burgeoning anti-Americanism. What evolved was selfish narcissism, an overriding concern with feelings over thinking, and a child-like demand for instant gratification. Yet even as they celebrated the joys of the self, they came to reject individualism, turning instead to collectivism, and finally to

an unrelenting demand for radical egalitarianism in all aspects of life. Thus a reliance on feelings, a strong contempt for authority, radical egalitarianism, and moral and cultural relativism, fused with the psychological power of youthful protest to forge a set of competing values to those of their parents.

And the values of their parents were the values of an older America: individualism, honesty, self-reliance, courage, frugality, a work ethic, a desire for excellence, pride in achievement, self-discipline, restraint, politeness, manners, respect for authority, and individual freedom tempered with personal responsibility. These were the values in which that they believed. They were reflected in the personal qualities that had helped them to succeed in life, and they contributed to a more civilized society.

Political protest also yielded a legacy of more or less unrelenting attack on established authority at all levels, with protesters making no distinction between authoritarianism, and the exercise of responsible authority. From war protests to the events surrounding the Watergate affair, authority figures were widely reviled as basely motivated, cynical, venal, and self-serving. This continuing denigration of (and ultimate victory over) established authority, quickly eroded the respect once given to our highest political leaders, and then to the police, the military, church leaders, and of course, to parents. It is against this social and cultural backdrop that we must examine the transformation of America's schools during this crucial period.

The Transformation of American Schools

American schools are facing a crisis of confidence as they find themselves embroiled in a struggle between two competing "philosophies" of education -- the traditional and the progressive. At least since the 1960s, progressivist ideas have been a dominant feature of the educational landscape. This approach has brought with it a number of practices which have introduced competing values, generated controversy, and weakened the social consensus necessary for effective schools.

Modern progressive education, as practiced in today's schools, finds it philosophical roots in the ideas of Rosseau, Herbert Spencer, and most especially John Dewey. But while progressivist ideas gained some ground throughout the 20th century in America, their influence was largely circumscribed, that is, until the 1960s when the beginnings of the social revolution were born in that massive generational conflict that pitted a new set of values against the more traditional American values.

Adocates of the values of the counterculture found congeial companions among the advocates of progressive education. And in turn, those writers who advocated progressivist education, now found fertile ground for their ideas. A generation of educational critics like Charles Silberman, Paul Goodman, Jonathan Kozol, John Holt, and A. S. Neill, argued for a "new education", one based on progressivist principles heavily imbued with ideas borrowed from humanistic psychology. The title of H. C. Lyon's 1971 book, "*Learning to Feel, Feeling to Learn*", reflected the emerging

philosophy that was to become a major force in shaping American education during the 1970s and 80s.

As progressivist ideas gained influence they became arrayed against a set of practices that had become associated with a more traditional approach to schooling in America. Cornel Hamm (1989), in a lucid treatment of educational concepts, points out that a cluster of notions have attached themselves to these two broad approaches. Traditional education has become associated with concepts such as: subject-centered, teaching, standards, examinations, structure, order, work discipline, memorization, mastery of subject content, order and accountability. Similar notions that have attached themselves to progressive education include: child-centered, emotions, activity, relevance, discovery, critical thinking, growth, and creativity.

A number of factors influence why schools adopt particular educational practices (Raywid 1983). Often the process is informal, eclectic, and trial-and-error. It may be influenced by perceptions of what are seen as current best practices, or the latest trend in education. then there are those cases where a conscious decision has been made to adopt practices in line with a particular "philosophy" of education, one which embodies a set of values to which the educational leadership is commiteed. Such philosophies of education play a key role key in matching the needs of today's children with the schools designed to meet those needs (Chandler 1997; 1998).

Broadly speaking, educational practices in today's schools may be seen as clustering into two identifiable groups, depending on the approach they take to various dimensions of schooling such as: organization, management, curriculum, and instruction. The characteristics of each model are described below:

Traditional Schools: Traditionalists emphasize academic standards in schools that tend to be more authoritarian, following a curriculum that is content-based, and formed around the traditional core disciplines. Such schools tend to emphasize structure and discipline, with some traditional schools mandating school uniforms. They typically rely on grading, tracking, and grouping children by ability level for instruction, and they tend to employ objective tests for evaluating student achievement.

Critics of Traditional approaches maintain that such schools impair children's development by imposing a rigid learning sequence, one which ignores the fact that children differ in the ways they learn. Moreover, they unfairly hold students to standards that are not consistent with their learning style. They see the focus on academics as being too narrow; emphasizing academic achievement, often to the detriment of other aspects of the developing child, like emotional adjustment. They also feel that traditional schools rely too much on direct instruction, and rote memorization. Finally, they feel that such schools with their teacher-oriented authoritarian instruction, tend to stifle children's natural sense of exploration and creativity.

Progressive Schools: Progressive educators believe in a child-centered approach, one that is more democratic, with the emphasis on group projects rather than individual performance for grades. They speak of a concern for the "whole child"-- hence their concern with social and emotional development, and the emerging sense of self-esteem. They advocate experiential, "discovery" learning which is led by the child, as opposed to direct instruction led by the teacher; cooperative and collaborative activities, as opposed to the competition inherent in grades and tests; and a concern with using differences in individual learning style to determine both the process and content of learning. They are concerned with developing processes like higher order thinking, and critical thinking; less concerned with the transmission of factual knowledge.

Critics of Progressive approaches believe that such schools, by de-emphasizing academic work, and emphasizing process over content, weaken the academic foundation necessary for a lifetime of learning. They feel the emphasis on self-esteem and children's emotional development is misplaced, often resulting in rewarding style over substance. They see the child-oriented approach, with the teacher being relegated to a less central role, as detrimental to adult authority and discipline.

The social values embedded in various traditional and progressive educational practices are shown in Table 1.

[INSERT Table 1 about here]

No matter what pedagogical reasons might be put forth to justify the adoption of a given educational practice, there remain psychological and social implications that ultimately speak to a set of values.

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Table1
Ten Sets of Values and their Expression in Educational Practices

Traditional Practices	**Traditional Values**		**Counterculture values**	**Progressive Practices**
Drill, computation; content instruction	Rational thinking	vs.	Emotional feelings	Self-directed learning
Individual classwork Homework	Self-discipline; work ethic; self-sacrifice	vs.	Impulsive; freedom of expression; Self-indulgence	Creative projects
School & classroom rules; dress code	Personal restraint; Politeness, manners	vs.	Liberation; freedom of expression	Relativism
Grades	Individualism	vs.	Collectivism	Collaborative projects
American heritage	National pride; patriotism	vs.	Cultural relativism; internationalism	Multiculturalism
Citizenship in social studies	Personal responsibility	vs	Social responsibility	Social concerns in social studies
Teacher as instructor	Respect for authority	vs.	Contempt for authority	Teacher as facilitator
Periodic testing	Personal achievement	vs.	Group achievement	Cooperative learning
Academic standards	Pride in achievement	vs.	Narcissism	Self-esteem; teacher encouragement
Academic honors	Striving for excellence	vs.	Lack of ambition	Adaptive grading

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Biographical Sketch

Louis A. Chandler, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. In addition to his ongoing involvement in educating teachers and other professionals to work in the schools, Professor Chandler has served as a school psychologist, and as a consultant to various school districts, agencies, and institutions. He has written extensively on childhood stress in contemporary society and the problems children face in learning to cope. Professor Chandler's current interests are in the psychological implications of school practices.